

Sunday Homily

15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

12 JULY 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III

“The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to you.”

Illustration

For twelve-year-old Winston and his classmates from the inner city, their first night’s camping on the farm was one of amazing new experiences. The very darkness was frightening, although they could see stars for the first time in their lives. The silence was another horror but, next morning, the sight of sheep and cows, the sound of birdsong and the smell of grass made up for it all. They learnt where their food came from, and the significance of the seasons. They forgot their MP3 players and computer games while they absorbed information about the fertility of nature, and the cycle of life and death in creation.

Gospel Teaching

Today’s readings use nature to teach spiritual lessons, but also concern the whole of nature itself. For, as biblical scholar Raymond E. Brown once wrote, “In Jesus risen the earth shares our future.” Because of that, he added, “We should take care of it.” Jesus himself was fully aware of the natural world, growing up in the stony hill country around Galilee. There he would witness farmers sowing their crops by hand before ploughing in those seeds that had fallen in decent soil. There would be a great deal of waste, but the harvest that would result was worth the risk.

The sower is used as a type of evangelist, casting his message before all, and hoping that some of it will take root in people prepared to listen with open minds. Not everyone wants to give the Good News a hearing – it can seem irrelevant, or too challenging; or they are just too self-absorbed and busy even to listen. Those who are “poor in spirit” will listen, for they know that the kingdom of justice, peace, forgiveness and healing is not anything they pay for with money, nor can they bring it about by their own achievement.

Only God can bring in the kingdom, as only God can make crops grow or rain fall or the sun shine. For God is the source and cause of the whole creation – this creation which is damaged by human sin, and yearns, or, as Paul puts it in his letter to the Romans, groans like a woman in labour, for its transformation. That transformation will surely come, slowly and quietly, like the growth of plants. It has been promised and has begun already with the coming of Christ.

This transformation is, as Paul expresses again, freedom from “slavery to decadence” – decadence being decay, suffering, death, all the consequences of the Fall. It is a transforming freedom for the whole of creation, for everything on earth has been touched by both human sin and divine redemption. Our minds can scarcely take in the scope of this wonderful kingdom where the whole of nature is renewed and where there is no more decay, no pain, no death.

Application

We hear the Good News of this kingdom, but ask ourselves what sort of soil we are. Do we enable the message to take root and grow? Do we produce a harvest of good works, signs pointing towards the kingdom and helping to bring it about? We also ask ourselves what sort of seed we are. Do we die to ourselves that Jesus may live in us? For Jesus says elsewhere that a seed has to die to itself to be transformed into a plant.

Yet another question is: what sort of sower are we? Do we attend to the word of God, reading, studying, praying and knowing scripture so well that we can be confident in relaying the Good News to others? Or do we rely on the “professionals” to do the work of sowing the word, the office-holders in the Church, the priests and religious? Is it enough to have faith sufficient for ourselves, but to be unable to explain or express that faith to others who may be hungry for it? How can we expect a harvest if we keep the seed to ourselves?

Yet we are assured that the kingdom will come, that goodness and healing will prevail. God’s purpose will not be frustrated, but, in his great freedom, the Lord has entrusted us with the responsibility of working with him to bring it about. God’s power and life make the plants grow, but the farmer has to work preparing the land, acquiring and sowing the seed, cutting the crops at harvest and grinding the ears to become flour. The kingdom will come about; but what are we doing to help to make it so?